

# Department of Human Services

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\*Important story at this spot

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MIRS

January 25, 2008

## **Ahmed: Overworked DHS Employees Are Heroes**

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) severely overworked employees do "heroic things" every day, but the work is taking its toll on employee morale, said new DHS Director Ismael AHMED.

Field staff who are supposed to manage around 200 cases are averaging caseloads of 600, with some taking 800 or 1,000 cases. Ahmed said employees are "completely overwhelmed" and he said the Governor's office and the Budget Office is becoming increasingly aware of the situation.

"Nobody can work under these conditions forever," Ahmed said. "We need to strengthen our ability to deliver through technology, but that will never replace the boots on the ground.

"The good news is that the people who came into this line of work did so because they believe in something and I believe that most of them still to. Our job is to remind them why they got into the work and thank them for the work they're doing."

Ahmed is the co-founder of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). He was appointed last August to succeed Marianne UDOW as the head of DHS (See "Ahmed Front Runner For Udow's Position," 8/6/07). Two months later, the Senate confirmed his appointment.

Last week, Ahmed sat down with MIRS to talk about several issues within DHS. The staff shortage, particularly in the child protection division, was brought up, which he addressed in describing his role as director.

"You tell the people that you're married to that you love them. There's no way to make that up," he said. "If you don't tell them, they don't know.

So I tell them the truth. They're heroes. And I believe they are."

The following are excerpts from that interview:

Q. Talk about the transition from ACCESS to one of the largest departments in state government.

A. In some ways, ACCESS was a good place for me to learn a lot about the different issues that the department faces at a street level. We worked very closely with the department, not only with new immigrants, but all sorts of low-income people, to try to assure them that their lives were improved and that they had jobs.

Like the department, we saw ourselves as part of the safety net that led people forward to productive lives. In a certain way, it's an interesting appointment, that someone at the ground level can bring those experiences and ideas to the policy level.

I'm not new to policy. I was active in national welfare reform activities and have done a lot on immigration issues. I have spoken before the Arab League three years in a row on U.S.-Arab relations. In a sense, I'm not new to policy and have been active around human service policy for a very long time.

But government is a new experience for me in a different way.

Q. How is this experience new to you?

A. Building agreements is a larger task, both internal and external. The thing that I've already found here is that people that who are on different sides on the aisle, different interest, are looking for the same outcomes. If it's around children's issues, they want children to live in permanent, supportive homes where they'll be loved.

If it's the general welfare system, they want a real and workable safety net, one that is a launching pad so people can be a productive part of society. I've not run into a single person that doesn't have those same general hopes. How we get there may be different, but if you're headed to the same place, you can talk to people about reasonable solutions.

It's really been pleasurable working with people like Sen. (Bill)

HARDIMAN

(R-Kentwood), Rep. (Dudley) SPADE (D-Tipton), (Budget Director) Bob EMERSON, the Governor, because they have the same goals. I'm not an ideologue. I've always been outcome-orientated and I think all of them are outcome-orientated. So what we have to do is agree upon the outcomes and walk forward together.

In the end, I know there has been a lot of critical review of the department over the years, but this is a department for good. It is a machine for good. Its very nature is that. It's supposed to improve the lives of people, help them get a start toward the future, which ultimately benefits everybody in the state.

You can't afford to have a fifth of our citizens not playing a productive role or going without food or a home. That's what the department was conceived to do and, in the main, it does that.

Q. Could you do it better?

A. Yes, it's clear from my short time. We can do a better job. It's clear that there needs to be child welfare reform and we're engaged in that. We need to provide outcomes in term of placements and all of those are difficult things, but we're now assembling the wherewithal, the resources, the ability and plan to do that. Some of them were in place, in fact, a lot of it was in place, so we didn't start from scratch.

But we're trying to get our own take on this and begin to move forward.

Q. What are some things you'd like to get accomplished in your time at DHS?

A. We're going to be looking at child welfare reform and trying to get greater public awareness of poverty here in our state. To look at the numbers, 75,000 people are in the family independent program. About 1.5 million are in programs providing food. We have more on Medicaid. When you put all those numbers together, there are almost 2 million people the department serves directly. That's about a fifth of our state.

About one in three in this state are low income, people who are not able to get along on their income. That's a third of our state that are either unemployed or underemployed, and the question that we have to ask ourselves is, "What kind of Michigan do we want when a third of the people are either not ready for work, out of work or are not working in jobs they can live on?"

There won't be an interview or place that I speak at where I'm not going to talk about that and I'm encouraging others to do that. We cannot ignore this problem and have Michigan be the kind of state we want it to be.

Q. What is the root causes of poverty?

A. I grew up in a working class family that was on cash assistance three times. My wife was on cash assistance. My mother was on cash assistance twice, once during the downturn in 1970. Both times were when the auto industry was out and my father was out of work for two or three years.

I grew up in a low-income, immigrant neighborhood and I don't believe - and there are exceptions to this - that anybody wants to live in poverty. I do believe that most folks want to live productive lives. I believe the problems are lack of education so people can't hold jobs, the lack of job opportunities, and, historically, racism has played a role in this.

I think we function with the belief that if you give people opportunity and a safety net, they will move forward. I think our JET program and our other employment programs are a good example of that. We have about 1,500 people moving off the rolls every month. We place 18,000 people a year, the problem is that thousands more come in that lose jobs.

I'm seeing more middle class and upper middle class people losing their jobs and they're less positioned to deal with that. They carry a big burden of ownership and costs with them and it takes them right down the hole. They really have to struggle because, generally speaking, their skills have been in a silo, so retraining is very important.

Q. The projections for the state and federal economy going into 2008 is that we're heading into a rough year. What are some estimates on what we

can expect as far as caseload increases?

A. As the economy goes down, our ability to move people forward is slow. In a recession, I would expect the numbers do go up. We're seeing that in some other areas. In food assistance, the numbers have gone up dramatically. In Medicaid, the numbers have gone up dramatically. I think people only look at the cash assistance side of things, but that's really the smaller part of what we do, as far as numbers, and doesn't give the whole picture. I think the Medicaid and food stamp side gives a better picture of what is happening.

The Governor is dead-on when she talks about education and retraining as the way out of this. I think everyone understands that. I'd like to see greater investment in the department in this. Simply moving people to jobs is not enough. The quality of those jobs in terms of stability is an important question we'd like to address more.

Q. How confident is the department on this "Children's Rights" lawsuit? (See "DHS Can't Continue With Settlement," 4/11/07).

A. I'm not supposed to comment on that, to be blunt. I think we're vigorously defending on it. For us, it's important that, in a general sense because I can't comment on the suit, the child welfare system is reformed. The Children's Rights people are well intended, but I don't think the court is the best father or mother for a family.

We want the freedom to have innovation in the child welfare system and to strengthen the management. The courts aren't very good at that.

Q. What have you told the Budget Office to expect as far as a possible pay out?

A. I cannot answer that. I will say that we've done some things in that area. I have asked Pat BABCOCK, along with a number of key leaders on both sides of the aisle, to help us figure out what outcomes we need to have and how to reform the system. They are already beginning their work.

In addition to that, we have been vigorously looking at our relationship with providers, public and private, to assure that that we're dealing with

them apples to apples and everybody is held to the same standards. We have already made some management changes in areas where we think management is part of the problem and we'll continue to do that.

Q. Has the department gone back on a prior pledge not to settle the case?

A. I can't comment on that.

Q. What is the update on the closure of the Maxey Correctional Facility?

A. The Legislature asked us to move 80 beds. Part of that, the placement of kids, needs to be done through the court. There are only 60 medium-security beds there anyway and we are moving ahead to try to find the appropriate placement for each child since every child is different. We're also moving many of the people who have worked there for a very long time, to assure that they'll work in other places where they can work with children.

Q. When will the unit be shut down?

A. May 1. It's also important also to note that we need facilities like Maxey. It doesn't need to be Maxey, but we need a place of last resort for those kids the private facilities won't take. That doesn't mean it has to be last resort as far as quality, either.

Q. Does religion have a role in these private juvenile justice homes?

A. I believe that good people are motivated by many things. Religious beliefs can be one of them, but there are so many motivational factors that give you the same outcomes. Having done the work I did before this, we had people who were religious. We had people who didn't believe in religions at all. We had people who believed very much in doing good work. There were so many motivational reasons.

Q. Under what circumstances should a welfare recipient have their benefits ended after 48 months?

A. I'm probably going to go against the tide on this, but the truth is

that each case has a separate identity and I'm not a big upholder of these rigid standards. They're akin to some of the standards we have in courts. For me, I agree that people should not be in the safety net forever. On the other hand, I would prefer to know that when someone leaves the safety net that they're capable.

I would like to see us be able to move that person into stable work. It takes time to do that well and it takes money. I would like kids in the system to be educated. It's different for each family and I wish there was a way to measure it.

But there is law. There is direction on this and as a public official, I'm going uphold direction, whether it's the best approach or not. On the other hand, I will continue to push more education for those in the safety net because I don't think our balance is appropriate right now.

Q. More than a year ago, the former director talked about 10 employees being investigated by the department for possible wrongdoing in the Ricky HOLLAND case. Have any of those people been disciplined? (See "DHS Releases Holland Report, 12/8/08).

A. That's an administration that predates me, so I can't talk a great deal about it, so it's history for me. What's not history for me, is some of the lessons that were learned from the Ricky Holland - the need for real transparency in the department, especially in these kind of cases.

It's my understanding that there was disciplinary action as a result of that. Honestly, I have not dwelled on Ricky Holland except of the lessons. It's clear that in the Ricky Holland case we were dealing with some pretty devious parents. It's clear that it was a horrific case.

We have 130,000 complaints a year for abuse. They investigate a very large portion of them. We act in 16,000 and we move 5,000 kids. It's tough to make the right decision because permanency and being with the family is very important, but you don't want to risk children's lives or leave them open to abuse.



**Canton woman found guilty in foster child's death**

January 28, 2008

By CECIL ANGEL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Canton woman accused in the death of her 2-year-old foster daughter was found guilty of second degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and first-degree child abuse in Wayne County Circuit Court this morning.

Carol Ann Poole, 42, will be sentenced Feb. 25 after being found guilty in the death of Allison Newman.

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### Driver sanctioned for leaving child on bus

Saturday, January 26, 2008

By Chad D. Lerch

[clerch@muskegonchronicle.com](mailto:clerch@muskegonchronicle.com)

A bus driver for Grand Haven Area Public Schools has been "significantly disciplined" for not noticing a sleeping seventh-grade student and leaving him unattended in an idling bus for 20 minutes.

The student slept through the drop-off at Lakeshore Middle School and the short ride back to the bus maintenance area, 1415 Beechtree, on Jan. 16, school officials said.

The driver, who failed to check for students after the route, got off the bus and went into the maintenance building. The bus remained idling for 20 minutes until she returned.

The student continued to sleep until the driver started on her way to an elementary school route. The student then approached the driver.

"That's when she realized she forgot someone and she brought him to school," said John Thatcher, assistant superintendent for human services.

The incident was captured on the bus' security video camera, Thatcher said.

"His classmates saw he was sleeping and they tiptoed around him," Thatcher said after reviewing the tape. "None of the students told the bus driver."

The driver's failure to make sure all the passengers had gotten off the bus is a clear violation of the school district's policy, officials said.

At the end of each school day, drivers are required to check the buses before placing an "empty" sign in the window. Then, officials check the buses a second time.

Officials "immediately notified the parents and showed them the videotape," Thatcher said.

The driver, whose name has not been released, has been punished "severely" but has not been fired.

Thatcher said the driver has an excellent performance record, which helped to save her job.

She remains a bus driver with the district, he said.

"Had it been a younger child, it would have been much more intolerable," Thatcher said. "But this was a middle school student and he was never in jeopardy. He wasn't even cold because she kept the bus running."

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Article published Jan 27, 2008

## Local dads class offers chance to talk over issues

Dads, stepdads and other male caregivers can get a lesson in nurturing through a free, 14-week class being offered through the Livonia Public Schools Ready, Set Go initiative and Spectrum Human Services.

The class meets 6-8:30 p.m. Tuesdays beginning Feb. 5 at Perrinville Early Childhood Center in Westland. Childcare, meals and transportation, if needed, are provided.

"It's an opportunity for men who have children in their lives to support each other and talk about issues," said Deborah Squirewell, preschool and family services specialist at Perrinville.

The class is targeted at men with school-age children who live in the LPS district, but it is not limited to district residents. Big brothers and grandfathers are welcome to participate. So far about eight people have signed up, Squirewell said. The target class size is about 15 students.

Brian Littleton is one of three program facilitators.

"I find that the fathers want to be involved. A lot of guys want to step up," Littleton said. The class uses the Nurturing Fathers curriculum. Topics include nurturing, playing, cultural influences, an employment workshop and balancing work and fathering.

Participants will get a certificate at the end of the course. At graduation, students' children are welcome to hear a speech by the dads, entitled, "The Father I Choose to Be."

Children are also welcome at a family fun day, when dads and kids will play games.

It's OK if a student can't make it to every session, he said. But incentives, like board game give-aways, will be given throughout the course.

The class is funded by a grant, which comes from federal funding through the Michigan Department of Human Services Healthy Marriage and Fatherhood Initiative.

To sign up, call Squirewell at (734) 744-2765, extension 28103.

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### **What about the children? Parents murdered by a significant other not the only victims**

Monday, January 28, 2008

BY JOHN AGAR

AND JOHN TUNISON

Gazette News Service

HOLLAND -- As she fought for her life, Lori DeKleine -- a strap tightening around her neck -- pleaded with her estranged husband, "Think of the kids."

Ken DeKleine responded, "I am thinking of the kids."

With his wife out of the way, DeKleine, a Holland police officer, allegedly told investigators he could have the children to himself.

The chilling statement was recounted by a state police detective.

The DeKleine case is among about a dozen high-profile slayings in recent years in which parents allegedly killed an estranged or ex-partner, killings that left children the ultimate victims. They found a parent's body or slept through the killing.

Troy Tyo's kids spent five days wondering what happened to their dad before the Allegan's man body turned up.

For three years, Alex Dawson, 4, lived with his father, Timothy Dawson, of Sparta, who was named a prime suspect a few months after the death of his wife, Julia. Timothy Dawson was arrested Friday evening at his Texas home on a murder warrant charging him in his wife's death.

The killings led an investigator to ask, "What ... were they thinking?"

Acting out of hatred

These children face a possible lifetime of hurt, anger, distrust, and, in some cases, even undeserved feelings of guilt as they grow up without those they relied upon most.

"There are three things going on that make this just what I call a 'triple whammy' for the kids," psychologist R. Scott Stehouwer said.

"No. 1, your mom dies. No. 2, she was murdered. No. 3, your dad did it. To the kids, it's ... an absolute numbing. It just sort of levels you."

They are essentially orphaned, and the world they once knew ends in an instant. Police, protective services and extended family members take over.

"We try to get them with family as soon as possible," Allegan County Sheriff's Office Detective Chris Koster said. "When you've got a murder-suicide, you got two sets of grandparents. How do you choose the best one? What (dynamics) of the family are going on? With young kids crying for somebody, that's the person we're generally trying to find."

Children are not a consideration for parents who kill. Parents act out of intense hatred for the ex-spouse.

"Perpetrators are extremely narcissistic people," said Stehouwer, chairman of Calvin College's psychology department. "Nobody thinks about the kids."

#### Long-term consequences

For the children, it takes time just to comprehend what happened. They need a long time to heal and support from the community, including church and school, before they can know they can have a normal life.

Allegan County Sheriff Blaine Koops said these "true victims ... must carry this burden for their entire life."

"In fact, in many cases, because of unresolved psychological trauma, many of the children will pass the trauma on to their children -- thus making it intergenerational. So now, not only must we deal with the immediate emotional trauma, the long-term consequences are even more devastating."

In some cases, family divisions -- the victim's family on one side, the suspect's on the other -- create problems for the kids. Others come together.

In Tyo's Dec. 3 killing, the suspect's brother and sister-in-law, Adam and Holly Osmun, care for the girls, ages 6 and 10. They attend elementary school in Gobles and are doing "excellent," Holly Osmun said.

The Gobles community helped renovate the couple's basement to create more living space and new bedrooms. The Osmuns have three young children of their own.

LaVette Wilson, a mother of three, adopted her sister's children, Brandon, 8, and Brooklyn, 7, after LaDena Wilson was killed in 2002.

She works full time and attends college. She has help from the three older children.

The young ones -- only 1 and 2 when their mother died -- do well in their Grand Rapids school and seem happy. They like to hear stories about their mom. Later, they can decide about their dad, something LaVette Wilson knows "they'll have to deal with."

Family members have come together in the aftermath of the November murder-suicide by Kevin Brainard, a Plainwell police officer. He shot and killed his wife, Pam, then himself. Family friends said she planned to divorce him. Left behind were their 2-year-old daughter, Kayla, and her 15-year-old son, Kyle Aukerman.

With the support of family members and his father, Kyle is doing as well as can be expected, said Pam Brainard's sister, Jennifer Drake. He lives with his father, and Kayla is living with Kevin Brainard's parents under temporary guardianship.

Still, family members are not sure how the couple's daughter, too young to understand the incident, will cope in later years.

"There are going to be questions no one can answer," Drake said.

It is difficult to understand how a police officer skilled in handling domestic violence failed to recognize the effect on the children.

"He had to be trained on what the children go through," Drake said. "He should have thought of the children and looked at what he was doing to an innocent baby and a fine young man."

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# Health plan serves 1,000

Elizabeth Huff  
*The Battle Creek Enquirer*

January 28, 2008

Last year, the Calhoun Health Plan found nearly \$2 million worth of free prescription drugs for county residents — more than double what they located for clients the year before.

The organization helped people such as Merrill Bowser, a 49-year-old chronically homeless man who needed two types of asthma and two types of blood pressure medications.

"I take my hat off to that place," he said. "I call them my lifesavers and that's what they are. They're angels."

The Haven of Rest resident said he would have considered doing "something wrong to get the money," meaning he would have "manipulated someone into giving me the money and then not paying it back," just to keep his asthma attacks at bay.

Having access to free life-saving drugs helped him stay in the Life Recovery Program. He now plans to graduate from the year-long substance abuse recovery program on Feb. 8.

The Battle Creek Community Foundation started the Prescription Drug Access Program in 1999 before Calhoun Health Plan took over in March 2006, CHP Executive Director Samantha Pearl said.

The program once was run by a registered nurse, part-time staff and volunteers who filed applications by hand, operating out of Burnham Brook. They were barely able to handle distributing about \$1 million in free prescriptions each year, said Jill Wise, BCCF Regional Health Alliance Health Consultant.

"To be honest, it became one of those things where we didn't promote the program because we were already working at capacity," she said.

"It used to be one of the best kept secrets in Calhoun County because they had very little room for growth," Pearl said. "We don't have to keep it a secret anymore."

By investing in technology, hiring more staff and increasing process efficiencies, Pearl said CHP has been able to keep up with the increasing demand.

It averaged 50 new clients per month in 2007 and now serves about 1,000 people. The number of providers involved in the program also increased to a high of 181 in November and dipped slightly to 176 in December, the latest count.

Considering there are about 20,000 uninsured people in the county and that number is rising, Pearl said she is planning on the program continuing to grow. She estimates the program will provide \$2.5 to \$2.75 million in free prescriptions in 2008.

On Wednesday, she presented to her board of directors a plan to expand into adjacent office space at the Toeller building, 190 E. Michigan Ave., where CHP is currently.

*Elizabeth Huff can be reached at 966-0684 or [ehuff@battlecr.gannett.com](mailto:ehuff@battlecr.gannett.com).*



## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Howell doctor halts his drug 'exchange'

Charitable efforts included recycling medication

Saturday, January 26, 2008

BY LAURIE HUMPHREY

#### The Ann Arbor News

Dr. Louis Pat May, an 85-year-old Howell physician known for his humanitarian efforts, agreed Friday to stop recycling prescription drugs brought in by his patients after getting a visit from state regulators.

May had initiated a "charity medical exchange" that included everything from crutches and oxygen tanks to blood pressure medications. It was the medications that got him in hot water with the state Department of Community Health.

Mike Wissel, pharmacy supervisor with the Health Regulatory Division of the health department, visited May on Friday after seeing newspaper advertisements the doctor had placed seeking medical supplies and medicine for recycling. He said the physician had agreed to quit giving away drugs.

"We'd better quiet that down until we get my lawyers into the act," May told The News late Friday.

Wissel, a pharmacist, said physicians are allowed to dispense prescription medicine that is packaged as samples from pharmaceutical companies, but the "whole thing about a doctor accepting prescriptions and recycling them. ... I'm a little concerned."

Wissel said May's actions could have been in violation of at least two state regulations had he continued to give away medications. Board of Pharmacy Rule (3338.472(1)) "prohibits prescription drugs from being returned or exchanged for resale once they leave the control of a pharmacist." A statute in the Public Health Code (MCLA 333.17766(f)) also "prohibits a prescription drug from being sold or given away that has left the control of a pharmacist."

He questioned the way these second-hand medicines may have been stored, if they have expired and what type of oversight exists regarding not only the medicines themselves, but the patients receiving them. "It may be a noble cause, but our job here is to protect the public," he said.

Wissel said that when he visited May's office Friday, he "did not find any controlled substances" or "anything concerning." He plans to follow up to make sure May continues to follow the state regulations.

May plans to change advertisements to limit recycling to medical supplies and dressings. Recycled prescriptions already in his possession will "get buried at the farm," he said.

May said earlier this week that he did not believe he was doing "anything illegal" and argued that the program makes sense for people unable to afford items they need to improve their quality of life.

"A lot of people don't have \$100," he said, noting the typical price of a doctor's visit, "and prescriptions can cost hundreds of dollars." His uninsured patients can be seen for \$50, receive prescription medication for \$20 and have free access to used oxygen tanks, walkers and more. Fees are also negotiable for his neediest patients.

Some of the medicines had been donated by or purchased through him from pharmaceutical companies while others are donated by the public, repackaged and redistributed.

"Before they (pills) are given out, I check them," said May. Using a pharmaceutical desk reference, he checks the pills against ones pictured in the reference book. Included in his stock of pills earlier this week were those designed to help patients with high blood pressure, heartburn, nerve damage, depression,



cancer and infection.

May sees himself a missionary who brings together people who need help and people with items they no longer want or need, but don't want to throw away. Expiration dates don't concern him, he said, explaining that a drug's effectiveness doesn't disappear overnight.

"It's such a waste," May said of the practice of urging people with prescription medicines to destroy unused pills.

"His heart is in the right place," said Mary Metz, a veteran nurse who recently left May's practice after 20 years of working at his side because of concern over dispensing the recycled prescriptions. "He just doesn't want anyone to hurt or anyone to commit suicide."

Asked if he was discouraged by the response his charity effort has generated, May said he "expected this (a visit from state regulators) to happen. I just didn't think it would be so fast." He added that people have been dropping medical supplies off "like gangbusters."

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Training for health-care petition drive

Saturday, January 26, 2008

Training on how to collect signatures for the Health Care for Michigan petition drive is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. to noon today at Unity of Kalamazoo, 1204 Whites Road. Signatures are being collected to put a constitutional amendment on the November ballot that would mandate controls on health-care costs and provide Michigan residents with affordable and comprehensive health-care coverage.

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## Woman freezing to death at home appalling

Posted by [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) January 27, 2008 08:06AM

Categories: [Voice of the People](#)

*ALBION* — I am appalled at the Jan. 3 story of the 90-year-old woman who froze to death and her disabled, senior citizen daughter was hospitalized because the utility company turned off their power.

How could this happen in America, the richest country in the world? Why was the story buried in the middle of the newspaper? Did the utility alert community charities or social services? The article said the woman was notified of the shutoff in writing and by phone

As a senior citizen and mother of three disabled adult children, let me enlighten people. Did it ever occur to anyone that maybe they could not understand or even remember what the lengthy phone message said; they did not get their mail because they were immobile or snowed in; or they did not read their mail because of poor eyesight or didn't know how to read?

Or maybe the mother, still caring for a disabled daughter at the age of 90, was just too sick and tired to do anything about it. Maybe the disabled daughter was trying to care for her 90-year-old mother. Can you visualize that? I can!

If utility companies can spend millions of dollars giving their buildings new facelifts or changing the word "power" to "energy" for their stationary, maybe they could make better use of their money and intelligence to design a new policy. Hire real people to answer the phones, and send no shutoff notices to anyone!

This policy should apply to all utility companies: power, gas and telephone. They are necessities in today's world.

— *Judy Collier*



## Advocates for homeless team up

Sunday, January 27, 2008

By Greg Chandler

The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Jacqueline Harper grimaced in pain as she sat at a table, her hand covering her mouth.

Harper, 41, has been homeless off and on for the past six years, lives on disability because of lupus, a disease she has battled for 25 years, and needs surgery for a gum disease that has cost her most of her teeth.

"I can't even get a dentist to do the surgery" because of the cost, the Holland woman said. "I'm in pain every day, 24/7.

"If the infection gets into my body, I could die."

Desperate, Harper has even

e-mailed a syndicated television talk show for help.

She sought help for her concerns Thursday at Western Theological Seminary, where the Ottawa Area Housing Coalition held its first Project Homeless Connect event.

Representatives from about 20 social service and governmental agencies that work with the homeless and those at risk for becoming homeless offered information on programs and services ranging from housing assistance to public transportation.

"It's a one-stop shop for people who are homeless or facing a housing crisis," coalition co-coordinator Lyn Raymond said.

Project Homeless Connect is a national effort to connect people with resources.

Lorraine Watson and her husband, Earl, also are seeking housing assistance.

Lorraine lost her job three weeks ago as a quality control inspector for Gerber Foods. She has been trying to move into federally subsidized housing for years.

The Watsons have lived in Holland the past two years and have a 12-year-old daughter.

"They covered everything I need, right here and now," she said. "It's a blessing that there's people that still care and want to help."

Last month, the coalition received more than \$845,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to fund programs. Agencies sharing in the funding included the Center for Women In Transition, Good Samaritan Ministries and Ottawa County Community Mental Health, Raymond said.

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## — THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Warm the Children generates a record, and a thank-you

Program helped 2,896 kids this season

Sunday, January 27, 2008

**BY SUSAN L. OPPAT**

#### The Ann Arbor News

The little construction-paper book came with a lot of love.

Addressed to the Ann Arbor News Warm the Children program, it had hearts drawn all over it by little hands, along with stars and moons and a house with a Christmas tree.

"Dear Ann Arbor News," it read, "I love the new clothes I got. Thak you verry muck."

Misspellings and all, it's just about the best thank-you note Norma Chase, Warm the Children manager for The News, has ever received because it came straight from the hearts of a little girl and a little boy, both of whom got new winter clothing this year.

And it's really meant to thank the News readers who donated time and money to the Warm the Children program.

When The News closed the 10th year of the program a year ago, Editor Ed Petykiewicz said the 2007 goal was to raise \$216,000 to buy \$90 worth of new winter clothes for 2,400 children, up from just under 2,000 children in 2006.

In the end, the program purchased clothing for 2,896 children during the Christmas season, an increase of about 45 percent from the previous year. A record \$220,433 was donated by readers and by Meijer, which primed the effort with a \$10,000 contribution.

"The response from our readers has been overwhelming, and it means so much for kids in need," Petykiewicz said. "The new clothing was the only Christmas gift that some of these children received.

"I'm also grateful for our volunteers and shoppers, who mean so much to these efforts. And Meijer has been a wonderful partner."

The News covers all of the administrative costs and overhead of Warm the Children, which means that each dollar donated by readers goes directly to clothing such as coats, boots and hats.

Clothing this year cost \$260,640, about \$40,000 more than the donations.

"We didn't want to turn away kids who needed clothing," Petykiewicz said. "The need was greater this year, in part because of the economic slowdown."

Chase said the thanks from children was wonderful, but only part of the story.

One social worker, she said, wrote that she was "just so thankful. Thank you for this program. It's been hard to find a lot of things for our clients." Warm the Children, she said, "has been a big help."

Even people who volunteer to help Warm the Children families shop for their clothes at Meijer thank the program for the chance to help.

One shopper, she said, sent several thank-you notes, one after each shopping trip. "I was impressed with

how thankful the children were, how polite the families were," she wrote.

Another shopper wrote that the mother in her Warm the Children family impressed her with her "practical and caring" clothing choices.

Tax-deductible donations still can be made by sending checks to Warm the Children c/o The Ann Arbor News, P.O. Box 1147, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1147.

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## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Warm the Children

Sunday, January 27, 2008

**What:** A program sponsored by The Ann Arbor News that uses reader donations to buy winter clothing for needy children. The News pays all administrative costs, so a dollar donated is a dollar for a child's clothing.

**When:** Each fall.

**To donate:** Send a tax-deductible check to Warm the Children, c/o The Ann Arbor News, P.O. Box 1147, Ann Arbor, MI, 48106-1147.

**For more information:** 734-994-6733.

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## Elks give out food baskets

Monday, January 28, 2008

Jackson Elks Lodge 113 didn't let the busy holiday season deter it from helping others.

A Christmas Charities program, coordinated by Esteemed Leading Knight Kelley Barron, had Elks members providing food baskets to more than 25 needy families in Jackson County.

On Dec. 22, Elks members delivered two boxes of food to families recommended by the Salvation Army. Polly's, 1210 Parnall Road, gave the lodge a 10 percent discount, Elks member Lorrey Michela said.

"We purchased bread, milk, eggs, ham, potatoes, etc. -- enough to provide breakfast on Christmas morning and dinner on either Christmas Eve or Christmas Day," Michela said.

Personal donations from members, several 50/50 raffles and a chili cook-off held during the Michigan-Michigan State football game netted \$1,150.

In keeping with a pledge to never forget veterans, Michela said Elks also adopted 13 residents from the John George Home. The residents were asked to make a Christmas wish list, and individual Elks members provided them with gifts.

"We delivered these items to the veterans at John George Home, along with a new baseball cap for each one, playing cards and a few novels," Michela said.

### Kids received toys

A generous Santa's helper is a regular visitor at the annual Christmas party for foster children that's hosted by Lutheran Social Services of Michigan-Jackson/Ann Arbor.

For several years, Philip Rosenberger of Jackson has volunteered to don his red Christmas suit and hand out gifts to foster children. The presents are donated by Rosenberger and the Military Order of the Purple Heart-Voiture 746 Forty & Eight.

At this year's party, more than 100 foster children received toys, said Diana Ripley, program manager of Lutheran Social Services.

"Mr. Rosenberger and the Order really put some thought into the gifts, buying the children things such as dolls and action figures," Ripley said. "We absolutely don't have the funds for gifts like this so we appreciate all that they have added to our parties."

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## Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties to join in prosecuting welfare fraud

Midday update

Kevin Grasha  
Lansing State Journal

A self-funded unit of the Eaton County Prosecutor's Office will handle most welfare fraud cases for three mid-Michigan counties, under an agreement announced today.

The centralized effort will increase efficiency, officials said.

"In reviewing how Eaton County handled welfare fraud cases," said Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III, "I came to the conclusion that Eaton County was ... getting a greater return for the money."

In addition to its own cases, Eaton County's economic crimes unit will screen welfare fraud cases from Ingham and Clinton counties to determine if they can be resolved without formal prosecution.

People accused of welfare fraud are given the option of paying restitution and a diversion fee, rather than be prosecuted in court.

Since 2006, Eaton County's welfare fraud program has netted more than \$126,000 in restitution and fees, Eaton County Prosecutor Jeff Sauter said.

People who don't choose the diversionary program will be prosecuted by their own county.

Read more on this story in Tuesday's State Journal.

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MIRS

January 25, 2008

## **DHS Employee Settles Case Over Holland**

A Department of Human Services (DHS) employee who claimed department employees were being made scapegoats by Gov. Jennifer GRANHOLM and former

DHS Director Marianne UDOW for their role in the Ricky HOLLAND murder case

has agreed to settle with the department.

While Gail CACCIANI declined to detail the conditions of the settlement, she confirmed that she was moved to another DHS post in downtown

Lansing

and that her attorney fees were taken care of.

She did tell MIRS that the settlement was "bittersweet." She said she's glad the case is behind her, however the underlying issue of her claim will not be heard. Cacciani's case was scheduled to be heard at a public grievance hearing Thursday. The case was settled before the hearing.

DHS officials declined to discuss details about the settlement.

Cacciani and another DHS employee claimed the upper management, the Ingham

County prosecutor and law enforcement, in their zeal to put away the seven-year-old's murderer - his parents Lisa and Tim HOLLAND - trampled over established DHS protocol and then hung out to dry field staff and low-level supervisors when the public wanted answers on how the system failed the boy (See "DHS Employees Cry Foul ..." 10/5/07).

In an employee grievances with the Civil Service Commission, Cacciani asked for an unspecified amount in restitution for publicly damaging her otherwise spotless service by inferring at a press conference that she and other employees were being investigated for wrong doing in connection with the case.